



THE LYNCHBURG PUBLIC LIBRARY

Celebrates Its Fortieth Birthday

PATRICIA K. DOYLE

In 2006, the Lynchburg Public Library will celebrate its fortieth birthday, aging gracefully into middle years from its beginning in 1966. It seems odd that a city the size of Lynchburg would have had a metropolitan library for only forty years, especially as the idea of a city library is much older than that.

As early as 1822, the Virginia State Legislature incorporated the Lynchburg Literary and Library Company, but apparently nothing came of it. The December 22, 1896, issue of *The News* reported a meeting at the Young Men's Christian Association to discuss the practicability of establishing a public library. A "considerable number of representative citizens, including fifteen or twenty ladies," attended. Those who advocated a library emphasized the importance and urgent need for it, and a committee was formed to plan the endeavor. The committee included many prominent businessmen: John W. Craddock (Chairman), Charles Blackford, D. C. Hammer, John P. Pettyjohn, O. B. Barker, Max Guggenheimer Jr., John Horsley Sr., J. H. Franklin, Dr. A.

Coke Smith, Carter Glass, R. I. Owen, and J. T. Yates. Soon after, the group received a charter, but because several of its members were engaged in other important matters, the committee decided that it would not be advisable to further push for the library.

Concurrently with this public interest, in 1892 George Morgan Jones, who had earlier endowed a memorial room at the Randolph-Macon Woman's College library, offered \$35,000 to establish a public library for the city. Nothing came of his proposal until after Mr. Jones' death in 1902, when his widow, Mary Frances Jones, agreed to give \$50,000 to build a library that was to be "wholly for the use of white people without respect to religious distinction." In 1904, Mrs. Jones incorporated and appointed a committee of local businessmen to oversee the construction of a suitable library building. The group included J. Gordon Payne Sr., Walker Pettyjohn, O. B. Barker, W. B. Hatcher, J. T. Armstrong, and A. R. Lang. The local architectural firm of Frye and Chesterman designed the magnificent building that still stands at 434 Rivermont Avenue.

The George M. Jones Memorial Library opened in 1908, and

until 1966 provided public library service to the city's white community. Non-whites and non-city residents were not allowed to enter. The volume of library users was so high that the library expanded its quarters in 1923 and later started three branch libraries: in the Aviary at Miller Park, the Fort Early Building, and Dunbar High School. The Jones Memorial Library board reached out to the black community by providing the books and furnishings for the library at Dunbar, and sent librarian Anne Spencer to library school. After World War II, the board gave the entire contents of the Dunbar library to the school system. The Jones Library continues to this day as a privately endowed institution; it has never received public monies.

By the early 1960s, Lynchburg had changed from a small southern town into a modern, bustling city of 47,000. Fueled by the post-war economic boom, northern businesses had come south looking for expanded markets and cheaper labor. In the mid-1950s, Lynchburg had become home to Babcock and Wilcox (B&W), a nuclear power company, and the mobile radio division of General Electric (GE), among others. The

city was flooded with newcomers, many of them highly educated and with young families. At the same time, the Civil Rights Movement was in full flower, and social consciousness was on the rise. In 1962 the Lynchburg public schools began integration. The next logical step seemed to be the establishment of a tax-supported public library that would be open to all citizens equally. Old and new Lynchburg joined forces toward the beginning of a movement that would make a difference in the life of the community.

The first step came in late 1961 with the establishment of the Interim Committee for Citywide Library Services. The volunteer members were primarily librarians, both black and white. James Dodd, B&W librarian, was elected chair, and other members included Jimmie Kyle, Susan Fain, Lucy Meade and Mary Pettyjohn. This committee drummed up public support by sending speakers to civic clubs across the city. The experience of Mary Breazeale, a reference librarian at Randolph-Macon Woman's College (R-MWC), may have helped the committee: Breazeale took the director of the R-MWC nursery school, a Chinese lady, to the Jones Memorial Library for some reading material for her students; the woman was turned away.

In January 1964, the interested parties met at Smith Hall, R-MWC. Sally Lippard recalls that Breazeale invited her and her husband, Dr. Carroll H. Lippard; Dr. William F. Quillian Jr., R-MWC president; S. Eric Molin, assistant professor of English at R-MWC; and J. Burton Linker of GE, to explore the possibility of a public library to serve the Lynchburg metropolitan area. James Dodd helped Linker, Breazeale, and Molin, the primary movers behind this effort, to

appoint directors from town and gown to oversee their work. Directors from the community included Elliott and Rosel Schewel, Lippard, Carl Hutcherson Sr., Pauline Weeden Maloney, Susan Fain, Kenneth White, and Mary Ellett. Soon the group initiated another meeting at R-MWC; about sixty people were present to hear Randolph Church of the Virginia State Library applaud their efforts and offer state support for a demonstration library.

In 1951 the Virginia General Assembly had initiated a demonstration library program to encourage the establishment of public libraries in localities where none existed. If a locality would provide a building, shelving, furniture, and utilities, the Virginia State Library would provide a basic collection of 25,000 books and manage the staff for up to two years. After that time, everything would be turned over to the locality.

The wheels of progress seemed to turn slowly, but organizing took time. Behind the scenes, Burt Linker had a conversation with R. C. Watts of the Jones Memorial Library Board, in which he "expressed the hope that cooperation between Jones Library and the city would be beneficial to both." Watts felt sure that most of the Jones board members would like to join a "Friends of the Public Library" organization as individuals and allow it to use their names in the membership drive. Soon after that, *The News* reported that the board of Jones Memorial Library had endorsed the efforts of a local group to establish a public city library.

During the summer of 1964 much effort was devoted to including both Campbell and Amherst Counties in plans for a metropolitan library for the greater Lynchburg area, but the counties soon made it clear that they preferred to have their own



Officers of the Friends of the Public Library plan for the library's grand opening in April 1966. Seated from left are: David Rowland, librarian; J. Burton Linker, president; and Samuel Cardwell, treasurer and finance chairman. Standing, from left, are John MacMillan, membership chairman, and Dr. Carroll H. Lippard, vice president and chairman of the opening ceremony.

JONES MEMORIAL LIBRARY

“Every other city of Lynchburg’s size in the United States has a public library—
as do Richmond, Danville, Roanoke, Charlottesville, Bedford and Amherst...We are losing more than
dollars. What we are losing beyond money, and losing irretrievably, cannot be counted or measured:
knowledge, pleasure, opportunity, and future excellence.”

separate library systems. On May 29, 1964, S. Eric Molin explained in a letter to Elliott Schewel: “The Virginia State Library has decided to back Campbell County and Lynchburg separately, giving them roughly 10,000 books and us the full offer (35,000 books). The long-range goal is still a metropolitan cooperative system, but the means to it is through independent libraries.”

On September 23, 1964, advocates met at Saint Paul’s Episcopal Church to organize formally as the Friends of the Lynchburg Public Library and seek the help of the Lynchburg City Council in taking advantage of the state demonstration program. The first library Friends group was started in Paris in 1913 and in the United States in 1922, so this name had a long history—there are now over 1,000 groups in the United States. However, the Lynchburg Friends may have been unique in that they were the only Friends of the Library who didn’t have a library! Officers and board members were elected, and a set of operating by-laws, prepared by attorney Edward Graves, was adopted, which gave the group a sound legal foundation. At the meeting, President Linker reported that City Council had indicated it could not support the idea of a public library unless it was shown that there was sufficient support from the general public. He said that the Friends would not make a request of Council until they could demonstrate such support.

This set off a grass-roots campaign unprecedented

in Lynchburg’s history. The Lynchburg Junior Women’s Club, the Lynchburg Chapter of Links, Inc., the Fort Hill Junior Women’s Club, the Jay-C-Ettes and other civic clubs agreed to canvass neighborhoods all over the city. Maxine Bice of the Lynchburg Juniors spearheaded the project; civic groups, scout troops, and various churches were recruited to help. Those organizing the canvass included Dorothy Richards, Pat Hughes, Miriam Taylor, Meredith Averett, and Susan Wingfield. Mrs. Averett recalls that citizens were asked to join the Friends and pay dues of \$1.00, indicating their support for a library for all residents. Volunteers were assigned specific neighborhoods in which to knock on doors and argue the case for a library, telling residents that the number of people who supported the Friends would be presented to City Council as evidence of broad support. Although many of those canvassed had little or no discretionary spending money, almost 5,500 citizens donated at least one dollar, making the Friends the largest dues-paying organization in the city. Not all the calls were businesslike. One volunteer said, “A lot of them would invite us in and try to feed us. The struggle wasn’t getting in the door sometimes, but getting back out.”

Lacking strong support from the local newspapers, in the fall of 1964 the Friends organization published an independent newspaper called *The Tribune*, which advocated a public library. About 10,000 copies

were distributed throughout the city. In an editorial, President Linker stated: “Every other city of Lynchburg’s size in the United States has a public library—as do Richmond, Danville, Roanoke, Charlottesville, Bedford, and Amherst...We are losing more than dollars. What we are losing beyond money, and losing irretrievably, cannot be counted or measured: knowledge, pleasure, opportunity, and future excellence.”

Later, *The News* and *The Daily Advance* endorsed the public library. A Sunday, March 21, 1965, editorial in *The News*, written by editor Philip L. Scruggs and executive editor Thomas R. Glass stated: “The Friends of the Lynchburg Public Library are (sic) about to remedy the city’s grave cultural deficiency through action by City Council when their presentation is made to council on March 23. It is extraordinary that Lynchburg does not have a free public library. The Jones Memorial Library is privately endowed, now very limited in resources and grievously restricted in use.”

On March 25, 1965, thirteen prominent business and civic leaders, among them James Gilliam Jr., Richard Gifford, Dr. William F. Quillian Jr., George Stewart, Hylan Hubbard, Donald North, General R. H. Harrison, the Reverend John L. Suttentfield, John D. Capron (speaking for Lynchburg College President Dr. Carey Brewer), Henry McWane, and Randolph Church (representing the Virginia State Library) presented City Council with the 5,500 names of citizens who had paid dues to the

Friends. Council was extremely impressed by the strong show of community support. Apparently, after the fifth or sixth speaker spoke in favor of a library, one Councilman threw up his hands, saying: "There has never been such an overwhelming demonstration of strength. Give them what they want!" The Friends had prepared the way so well that Council voted unanimously to apply for the Demonstration Library.

There were seven possible sites for the library, most of them downtown, which was then the city's prime shopping area. They included Brown Morrison office supply and the J. C. Penney stores, the Reams Building and the second floor of the Raylass Building—all on Main Street. Other locations considered were the old Fleet Building on Commerce Street, the Miracle Mart on Tate Springs Road, and Robert E. Lee Junior High School on Twelfth Street. Elliott Schewel was sent to New York to request that the owners of the J. C. Penney store give it to the city, but after a discussion with one of their vice presidents, he was turned down. Finally, the city-owned Fleet Building was selected. The lower floors were occupied by the maintenance department of the city; the library would be located on the third floor, which contained 800 square feet. Because of Lynchburg's sloping terrain, the third floor was level with the new Main Street parking deck, and the address would be 914 Main Street, behind what were then the Snyder and Berman, McGehee and Reams stores, now owned by High Peak Sportswear and Davidson, Doyle and Hilton, C.P.A.s. Montgomery Construction Company renovated the building, and it was decorated with the advice of Colonel Edley Craighill, City Manager Robert Morrison,

and Connie Davies, a local interior designer. Sally Walker, Laura Bristow and Margaretta Harper designed decorative plantings for the entrance. David Rowland was the first library director: the thirty-five-year-old native of West Virginia hired the staff, and with considerable help from the Virginia State Library, built an opening-day collection of 35,000 books.

The demonstration unit opened at the city parking-lot entrance on April 16, 1966. It was a festive day of celebration for the city. Volunteers built a bunting-covered bandstand in the parking lot, and the E. C. Glass band played the national anthem. Balloons and banners were distributed and a ribbon cutting was held, with Mayor James P. Ould officiating. The Reverend John Sutenfield, pastor of Fairview Christian Church and a former mayor of Lynchburg, gave the invocation. Distinguished guests included Senator A. Willis Robertson, Congressman Richard H. Poff, Lynchburg state senator Robert S. Burruss Jr.,

Lynchburg delegate William M. Dudley, and Lynchburg-Amherst delegate Donald G. Pendleton. The principal address was given by Randolph W. Church, librarian of the Virginia State Library and a native of Lynchburg, who was the valedictorian of E. C. Glass High School's class of 1924. During the open house that day in the library, the Dunbar High School Concert Band played for the large crowd.

At the time of the library opening, The board of The Friends was composed of J. Burton Linker, president; Dr. Carroll H. Lippard, vice president; Samuel Cardwell, treasurer; Patricia K. Doyle, corresponding secretary; Pauline Weeden Maloney, recording secretary; and members Elliott Schewel, John H. MacMillan, Mary Breazeale, S. Eric Molin, Nancy Watkins, Mary Ellett, and David Rowland, librarian. Within eight months, the new Lynchburg Public Library had circulated 100,000 books.

In 1968 Jane Black became the first Lynchburg Public Library



Senator A. Willis Robertson, addressing the "standing-room only audience" at the Lynchburg Public Library's opening ceremonies on April 16, 1966.

JONES MEMORIAL LIBRARY



JONES MEMORIAL LIBRARY

Lynn Dodge, left, is congratulated upon being named librarian of the Lynchburg Public Library in August 1974. With her when her appointment was announced at City Hall were, from left: Odell Washington, chairman of the Library Advisory Board; W. P. Ellis, director of the Department of Civic Enrichment; and David B. Norman, city manager.

director hired by the city. She received her graduate degree at McGill University in Montreal and had served as library director at Smith College. Her husband John was the art director at the Lynchburg Fine Arts Center. The Friends of the Library continued its support: in 1969, with a \$10,000 grant from the Old Dominion Foundation, the Friends' second president, Dr. Carroll H. Lippard, originated the very successful Asian Affairs Study, which opened citizens' eyes to the East. As Dr. Lippard wrote in a letter to the community, "We have been a Europe-oriented country because our country had its roots there...It is becoming increasingly apparent that the intense problems we and our children will have to face will involve Asia...Understanding of the factors that influence how Asiatic people think and act...is essential."

The study brought leaders of countries in the East, including Philippines General and former President of the U.N. General Assembly Carlos P. Romulo, and South Korean Ambassador Dong Jo Kim. In addition, American speakers included Pulitzer-Prize

winning journalist Harrison Salisbury of *The New York Times* and former U.S. Ambassador to Vietnam Frederick Nolting. Many other dignitaries appeared at venues as varied as the library, grade schools, churches, and E. C. Glass High School. For two months, the Lynchburg calendar was filled with seminars and discussions led by faculty from R-MWC, Sweet Briar College and Lynchburg College.

After the Asian Affairs Study was over, life at the library turned inward as staff focused on building use. Children's story-time programs attracted many young families—to the point that the children's department outgrew its cramped quarters. Thus, in 1972 City Council provided funds for the library to expand upward to the next floor. Children's services, cataloging and magazine storage were moved to the renovated 8,000-square-foot space.

In 1974, Jane Black accepted a library position in her native Canada. After a six-month search, during which the reference librarian, Mary Douglass Boldrick, was acting director, Lynn Dodge

was hired as the third library director. After her family moved to Lynchburg in 1960, Ms. Dodge graduated from E. C. Glass High School in 1964. Upon graduation from Meredith College with a B. A. in history and political science, she received her M. S. in library science at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Ms. Dodge then worked for David Rowland for five years as branch head for the County of Henrico Public Library in Richmond. She is now the director of libraries and museums for the City of Lynchburg, and for the past thirty-one years has been the guiding force behind the immense presence of the library.

In 1977, with the assistance of the city planning department, Lynn Dodge drafted a master plan for the library, which recommended a



JONES MEMORIAL LIBRARY

During the 1976 National Bicentennial, sixty children came to an ice cream party at the library dressed as their favorite American book characters.

more centrally-located main library and branches in the Boonsboro, Timberlake and downtown areas. City Manager E. A. "Sonny" Culverhouse asked Ms. Dodge to search for an alternate location, in case the cost of expanding the existing library was prohibitive. There was considerable news coverage about the possibility of moving, and although it did not happen, she feels that it laid the groundwork for the public demand heard during the City Council campaign of 1980, when many citizens asked for a new, better-located library. City Council heard

of daily patrons almost doubled. Under the presidencies of Jo Penley and Michael Madden, the Friends raised \$20,000 for furniture and equipment for the new building.

The library's role expanded further when, in 1985, the Lynchburg Bar Association asked it to assume responsibility for the public law library that its members had been maintaining voluntarily. The law library was moved from the second floor of the Circuit Court Building to the lower level of the new City Hall, where space had been reserved for a downtown branch library. In 1987,

which have limited law libraries, send written requests for copies of court cases, etc.; and the legal community uses the books and online service regularly. Marilyn Martin has supervised both the law library and the general circulating branch library since their opening. Now the library had come full circle by returning to a downtown location.

Also in 1987, the Jones Memorial Library moved into the space above the public library. The Jones' board of directors had tried to renovate the old building and keep the collections of valuable and genealogical books and papers, but the cost was prohibitive. The city was delighted to be able to provide a space that would keep the historical papers intact; now the Jones board pays a modest amount of rent to the city.

The next major event in the library's life occurred in 1989, when City Council appointed a Blue Ribbon Memorial Committee on Civil Rights to suggest ways to memorialize Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Attention immediately focused on the library for establishing a center for human rights there. Council appointed a seven-member citizens' committee to oversee the center and to raise money for its construction. The group raised \$30,000 to open the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Human Rights in 1991. Its gala opening included a speech by Dr. Joseph Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Committee, given to a packed house at E. C. Glass High School.

The Memorial Committee on Civil Rights encourages the preservation of the United States' heritage, nurturing of positive human relations, the furtherance of racial and economic justice, the nonviolent resolution of conflicts and the development of



THE NEWS AND ADVANCE

Members of the news media are shown through the new library space at the former Sears store at the Plaza

its constituents, and in 1981 voted to spend \$2,000,000 of local tax dollars for the former Sears store at Pittman Plaza to house a new main library. With 36,000 square feet, it was over twice the size of the original library, and much more centrally-located. The architectural firm of Cress-Rhodes was chosen to renovate the building and Hancock-Fuqua Company was the general contractor. When the library opened in 1984, the number

City Council provided funding for the public library facility. A fee of \$4.00, which is assessed on civil court cases, supports the law library; annually, about \$55,000 is collected and spent.

There are many categories of users downtown: John Q. Citizen looks for help in writing a will, filing for divorce, or fighting a drunk driving charge; inmates at the Blue Ridge Regional Jail and Rustburg Correctional Center,



THE NEWS AND ADVANCE

Today the Lynchburg Public Library, with an average of 800 visits each day and a checkout of 450,000 items each year, is a focal point of our community.

a community free of prejudice and discrimination. The committee relies solely on donations, grants, and partnerships to provide service to the public. It opens new exhibits on civil and human rights almost annually. The 2006 exhibit will focus on the history of the library.

The history of the Friends and the history of the Library are inextricably joined. Since its inception, the Friends organization has provided service and raised money to supplement state and local funds, mainly through memberships and owning the library's copy machines. In addition to raising the money for furniture, the Friends established the adults' and children's video collections with a donation of \$12,000. In 1995, under the leadership of Anitra Webster, it provided funds to establish a volunteer program and committed to an annual appropriation. In the last ten years, the Friends has given \$125,000 to support this popular program—in 2004, 100 volunteers provided 4,000 man-hours, with a value approaching a half-million dollars. In addition,

since 2002, the Friends has supported a community reading program—Lynchburg Reads—which brought authors David Baldacci, James McBride, and Sharon McCrumb to speak here. The Friends contributes annually to the children's summer reading program and provides funds to purchase adult books.

Advocacy has always been a major purpose of the Friends. In 2004 the organization was put to the test when the city administration threatened to reduce library funding by \$175,000. A significant reduction in hours and staff layoffs loomed. President Ellen Nygaard headed a community-wide campaign to save the library funding. Over 1,000 citizens reached City Council and hundreds of children drew pictures. The funding was restored.

In 1994, the Friends established an endowment fund, the income from which will provide a secure source of support for the library. Now it has committed to raise \$140,000 for the endowment fund in honor of the library's fortieth anniversary in 2006.

The library, with an average of 800 visits each day and a checkout of 450,000 items each year, will always be a major focal point in our community. Its reach exceeds its grasp, so that every year something is added which quickly becomes a necessity. As technology has rapidly progressed, the library has added to its store of aids for the public. From the first media, 33 1/3 phonographs, it has now graduated to audios, videos, books on tape and CDs, and recently, DVDs and MP3-compatible CDs. The library's programs of computer classes, free use of computers (150 people a day use them), and the Gates Computer Lab have been most popular.

In 2006 the Friends' birthday celebrations will include at least one special event each month: a mother-daughter book discussion, a traveling birthday party using Gus, the Learning Bus, poetry trees in both the adult and youth libraries, and an angel tree for the elderly. The Lynchburg Reads lecturer will be Orson Scott Card, a speaker for both adults and children. During the birthday week, the library will have special prizes and favors for those who visit.

For forty years, the Lynchburg Public Library has been the most visible and the most used of the city's services. It has acted as a beacon for all our citizens who wish to read, to study, to learn, and to have fun. Happy Birthday, friend, and many more.

Pat Doyle graduated from St. Mary's College, received her M. Ed. in the teaching of English at Lynchburg College, and completed other post-graduate work at the University of Virginia. She retired as an associate professor of English from Lynchburg College.